A Guidebook for
Intergenerational
Programming

Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation

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When is Old??

When is old?
When you're 20 it's 40
   But 40 can be naughty.
At 30 it's 50
But at 70
50 is nifty.

At 40, 60 is a sage
But 80 says
60 is a wonderful age.

Wherever you are
it's on the way
But definitely
it's not today.

   By Janet Neuman

Acknowledgements

The material in this manual came from many sources. Mr. J.A. Wilson McCue of the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, provided the initial encouragement and support for the development and collating of topic areas.

Program ideas came from my own professional experience as well as from discussions with colleagues. I am grateful for their time and patience and their willingness to share information.

Under the leadership of Mr. Kenneth H. Pflug, Director of the City of Waterloo Community Services Department, the opportunity has been given for the development of innovative leisure services for older adults, from which has stemmed an intergenerational concept.

Included are suggestions and ideas from my own staff members at the Waterloo Adult Recreation Centre. Without their constant encouragement this manual would have been difficult to complete.

All of the above mentioned played vital roles in the completion of this manual, but it is to the older adults with whom I have had the pleasure to work that I wish to express my deepest gratitude. Their collective wisdom, experience and good humour have allowed intergenerational programs to expand and grow. I also wish to thank them for sharing their thoughts and opinions, many of which are included here.

Kathy Durst

Introduction

The magnitude and scope of recreation programs have changed rapidly over the last 25 years. The older person today has little in common with his or her counterpart in 1958. Today's older person is healthier, possesses a higher level of education, and is more economically independent.

In response to this change, senior centres and clubs have flourished and expanded to provide a multitude of leisure services incorporating varying degrees of participation. Once considered facilities and programs unto themselves, they are often now considered "focal points" in community life. To participate in seniors' programs is to participate in the community.

In response not only to the changing nature of the older adult but to the rapidly expanding role of senior programs, recreationists are now constantly challenged to provide leisure activities that will match the needs of participants.

Intergenerational programs are an example of one such response to these needs, and are a natural outcome of the high profile of the older adults in the community and their continuing demands to remain vital and contributing members of that community.

This manual is designed to assist both paid staff and volunteers in the development of intergenerational programs. It gives some theory and, where appropriate, program examples are included. The program examples are by no means exhaustive. Intergenerational programs are as limitless as the imaginations of the planners and participants. It is therefore difficult to include a complete list but the principles included here may be applied to any program you are planning.

While it is recognized that, in theory, intergenerational programming exists when a 55-year-old participates in a program with a 75-year-old, this manual is aimed at the interaction of the young and the old.

Intergenerational leisure activities offer a rare opportunity for participation in innovative age-integrated programs.

The Elderly

According to Statistics Canada in their report, *Canada's Elderly,* our population is growing older and in 1971 was designated an aging population by the United Nations.

Characteristic of most industrialized countries, an aging population means an increase in the proportion of older persons in the population. Currently there are 3.2 million Canadians over the age of 65, or 9.5 per cent of the population. By the year 2000 this is expected to increase to 13 per cent, as the "baby-boom" population grows old.

The definition of "old" has varied throughout history and continues to vary among cultures. There have been times in our own culture when old happened at age 40. In most cases, the concept of "old" has been related to an expected life span.

Today Canadians are living longer and at age 65 can expect to live another 13.7 years if they are male, and 17.5 years if they are female.

It is difficult to clarify what the concept of "old" actually means. To simply define old in chronological terms (age 65 or older) is inadequate. In order to more fully describe and understand the aging process, it is necessary to examine three elements:

BIOLOGICAL AGE: Refers to a person's expected life span, taking into consideration a number of factors including genetics, heredity, environment and lifestyle. Biological age indicates the number of years a person is likely to survive.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AGE: Refers to the individual's ability to adapt to changes in his or her environment. As one grows older one often responds to challenges and changes with less energy and strength than were formerly available. The individual's level of adaptation is affected by such life events as retirement, widowhood, perceived or real loss of status, drop in income, etc.

SOCIAL AGE: Refers to the standards of dress, language and behaviour that are the rules of society for individuals at a

certain chronological age. Through the process of socialization, individuals come to learn the values and appropriate behaviours of their society.

Social gerontology studies the ways in which various age groups are related to the society in which they live and, in particular, the relationship between the elderly and the rest of society. They have studied how these relationships are maintained and how rules and regulations for behaviour of the elderly are established.

Social age also includes the reaction of the elderly to various social changes around role loss and role change, changes in family relationships, change in occupational and economic structure and change in community life.

Being old therefore, is a combination of many factors; for example:

Mr. Smith has just celebrated his 65th birthday. His life expectancy is, according to the statistics, approximately 13 years. Therefore he would not be considered biologically old. However, Mr. Smith believes that, at age 65, he has lived his life and sees no future for himself and expects to die very soon. Psychologically, he appears to be much older than his chronological age and his social age reflects behaviours and characteristics of a person much older than 65.

On the other hand, we are aware of many persons considered to be biologically old whose psychological and social age reflect the attitude of a person much younger.

One of the problems facing social gerontologists studying issues pertaining to older persons is the "heterogeneity" (individual nature) of the older population. Ironically, one of the most prevalent myths surrounding the elderly is that they are a homogeneous group of persons over the age of 65 having very few individual differences. In fact, the reverse is true. As

persons mature through adulthood a greater uniqueness is developed, so that by the time they reach the older years there are more examples of individuality than with any other age group.

The ability of the elderly to adapt to numerous life changes is contingent not only upon the individual's attitude toward aging but to:

– physical and mental health
– personality
– earlier life experiences
– availability of family supports

– adequate support services
– adequate personal resources
– availability of appropriate leisure activities and a **Social Role.**

As people grow older negative feelings and a poor self-image are increased by the loss of formerly-held social roles, such as those of worker, wife, husband, friend, mother, father. Accompanying the loss of roles is the loss of status that went with these roles.

Intergenerational programming allows for the development of optional roles (such as foster grandparent, tutor, advisor, friend) in which the elderly are faced with new problems, new challenges, ideas and perspectives as well as a source of self-fulfilment.

It also allows for the matching of those who need help with those who need *to* help, as in the case of the Senior Aquatics Club assisting in the swim program for physically-disabled children.

As with the young, older persons need to perform useful, productive, and socially-relevant roles. When older people act as instructors in school arts and crafts programs, volunteer as drama and music assistants, or act as advisors to small businesses, their skills are utilized. Those skills might otherwise go unused. Intergenerational programming offers many opportunities to develop "replacement" roles for those lost, and to expand current leisure-time involvement.

Ageism

Coined by R.N. Butler, the term ageism refers to inaccurate prejudgements regarding the elderly, based on misconceptions, half-truths and ignorance. Inherent in the concept of ageism is the assumption that personality, behaviour and social traits are determined by chronological age. On a very practical every-day level, age bias can take three forms.

AGE RESTRICTIVENESS: *Question:* When engaged in a leisure counselling session or when introducing programs to a new participant, have I ever discouraged participation in an activity because of age? All things being equal, would I support the same activity for a 75-year-old that I would for a 55-year-old?

Mr. Jacks is a very active 75-year-old. He is keenly interested in the outdoor activities program being sponsored by the local senior centre. On one day the activities included walking and snowshoeing. Mr. Jacks signed up for the snowshoeing but when he arrived at the program location, he found his name on the walking list.

When he inquired as to why, he was told that snowshoeing was considered too strenuous and that he would be ''better off'' walking with the older participants.

Mr. Jacks has arbitrarily been eliminated from the snowshoeing program because it was decided that, based on his age and assumed physical condition, it would be dangerous. On the other hand, it is assumed that those younger persons participating in the snowshoeing are physically able to do so.

AGE DISTORTION: *Question:* Have I ever made assumptions about an older person based on his or her age?

Mr. Jones is a very active program participant. He is secretary-treasurer of a new horizons grant, president of a local card club, a member of a theatre drama group, a volunteer in many support services for seniors and a member of the executive of the retired employees group where he worked. In one week, he attended eight different meetings. At two of these he left behind his briefcase and at one he brought the report from another meeting. At this point a staff person was heard to remark, ''What can you expect, he is 73 years old?''

A young person forgetting meetings, appointments, materials is thought to be very involved in a busy work schedule. An older person doing the same is accused of being confused and possibly bordering on senility.

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE: *Question:* How often do I take an immediate dislike to a person based solely on their age? Do I tend to feel more comfortable with persons of my own age? Do programs for the elderly in my community reflect the needs and wishes of all, and span the generations from the young-old to the old-old?

The local high school theatre group has asked to use the stage at the senior citizen centre on the weekend, while their stage is being repaired. Some members of the senior drama group object because none of them is available to supervise and they are concerned that damage may occur. It has been the policy of the senior drama group to allow other senior groups the use of the stage but they have never been approached by high school students. The seniors said their reluctance to consider this request was based on things they had heard and read in the newspaper on vandalism and teenagers.

Myths

Ageisms and resulting age biases are the result of myths and stereotypes which have their root more in fiction than in fact.

For example:

For many younger people, most older people are:

- inflexible, rigid and set in their ways
- over-conservative in dress, conduct, politics and popular viewpoint
- a homogeneous group of persons 65 years of age and older
- weak, feeble, in poor health, institutionalized, dependent, and lonely
- if not senile, definitely declining in intelligence and the ability to learn
- non-productive
- sexless.

On the other hand, many older persons see the majority of younger persons as:

- immature, lazy and playful
- disrespectful of authority and property
- careless, impulsive, and irresponsible
- extreme in dress, manners, behaviour and popular viewpoint
- loud, boisterous and irritating
- lacking in experience and general knowledge.

Mythical and stereotypical portraits of persons such as the ones mentioned here continue to be an integral part of the general images the young and the old have of one another.

These images have given rise to the popular concept of **Generation Gap.**

Popularized by the mass media, the term generation gap refers to the real or imagined, profound or trivial, inter-age differences. We live in an age-segregated society with little

opportunity to form inter-age informal relationships. Because of this, sociologically, we have become divided into:

      – the young
      – those over 65
      – everyone else in between.

This segregation has not only contributed to a generation gap, but produced a **Knowledge Gap.** Intergenerational programming seeks to fill the knowledge gap in order to diminish the generation gap. For the young, opportunities for participation in well-organized programs promoting inter-age relationships can reduce their own fear of growing old. It is this fear of aging that can cause the differences to appear greater than they otherwise might be.

Indeed, intergenerational programming responds to the fact that the young and the old are indeed natural social allies. Both groups find themselves stereotyped in a way that middle-aged persons are not. Both are reminded of their non-productive role in society. Neither seems to have much influence on the decision-making process.

As well, both groups exist in a relatively unstructured time situation. To the working individual who structures his or her life around the work day, the work week, and the work year, students seem almost free, and the elderly appear absolutely free.

When opportunities for interaction between the young and the old are presented, it is not surprising that they find any generation gap easily overcome.

The Intergenerational Concept

Historically, the concept of intergeneration programming as an integral part of senior recreation services was born of the desire by younger members of the community to entertain the elderly, or to learn about them as part of a school project. While both of these activities were admirable in their intent, neither usually resulted in much intergenerational communication and/or understanding.

Intergenerational programming is described as

> **the deliberate organization of non-age specific program opportunities of both a structured and non-structured nature.**

Contained in this definition are three important considerations:

NON-AGE SPECIFIC: Refers to the removal of age barriers as a criteria for participation in a program for older adults, or the planning by older adults of programs directed at younger persons.

DELIBERATE ORGANIZATION: Refers to the inclusion of intergenerational programming as an integral part of the total services offered to older adults within the organization with the accompanying appropriate program planning principles.

STRUCTURED OR SPONTANEOUS: Refers to the availability of self-directed activity between the old and the young as well as participation in traditional pre-planned scheduled programs.

Intergenerational programming has as its primary focus a mutually beneficial exchange across the age ranges. This exchange was thought to be of importance because:

> "Older persons have the same basic needs as persons of other groups, that is – the opportunity to form meaningful and lasting relationships with people of all ages and to remain a participating member of the community in which they live."

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New relationships are especially important to those elderly who have lost relatives, friends and family supports. For example, retirement and widowhood terminate a person's participation in two of society's main institutions-marriage and work. As a rule, the loss of these relationships is not followed by entry into other significant groups, in particular, age-integrated groups.

At every stage of life individuals need confirmation of self-worth and self-esteem. This is enhanced by participation in activities that have meaning for them. Recreation activities that foster satisfying interpersonal relationships encourage people to share themselves in a variety of ways.

Senior citizen centres and clubs have done much to fill the gap in programs and services for older persons. These agencies usually attract membership from across the community rather than from a single neighbourhood. This makes it difficult for programs to satisfy the needs of all, no matter how sophisticated the service level. There is nothing inherently wrong with providing recreation programs based on age and, in fact, on some occasions peer groupings are more advantageous. However, a strictly age-segregated service tends to create an insular atmosphere which is counter-productive for older persons, the program, and the community. This geographical separation ultimately tends to imply that age groups will associate with peers, and friendships with other age groups will disappear.

> **"The wealth of knowledge and expertise contained in the older population is often an untapped resource in the community. The years of practical skills and experience can be of tremendous assistance in a variety of times and places."**

Intergenerational programming allows for the older person to perform the function of "elder". The "elder function" refers to

the natural wish of the old to share with the young. It is important to a person's self-esteem to be acknowledged by the young as an elder, and to have one's life experiences seen as interesting and one's skills as valuable.

In an informal manner, this elder function takes on the role of counselling or advice-giving. In a more structured format, this elder function may be performed through such programs as:

- taping and use of oral histories
- senior in the school activities
- in service learning projects in senior centres
- leadership development programs in youth agencies
- volunteerism in community agencies
- business and administrative assistance in the community
- volunteer roles in youth groups
- pre-retirement counselling
- teaching child care and babysitting techniques to teenagers

(others)

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The list is by no means complete but gives an indication of the scope of skills available and the application of the elder function.

In a very mobile North American society, career-oriented families move, separating parents, grandparents and grandchildren.

Eighty per cent of all older people have living children, and families may now span three to five living generations. However, the once-stable role of grandparent has been jeopardized by career-oriented upwardly-mobile children who move where the opportunities for career advancement are. Coupled with this is the increasing rate of family separation and divorce.

The role of grandparent has offered many older persons a new lease on life as they relive memories of their own parenthood and, relieved from the immediate problems of motherhood and fatherhood, appear to enjoy their grandchildren more than they enjoyed their own children. For the grandchild, the grandparent is often viewed as the substitute parent, the fountain of family wisdom, additional source of affection and fun, as well as the gift and treat dispenser. The separation of these two generations often causes anxiety, depression and an acute sense of loss.

This isolation can be reduced by participation in programs such as:
- foster grandparent program
- volunteer program in day-care facilities
- volunteer program with foster children
- volunteer program in hospitals and special-care facilities

(others)

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"Intergenerational programs help dispel the myth that the older population is a homogeneous group of dependent, sick and senile persons and that all younger persons are wasteful, irresponsible and disrespectful."

Educational and recreational programs have traditionally separated the young and the old. Because there is little formal interaction between them, existing stereotypes are perpetuated and new ones are fostered. Recreationists must realize that traditional approaches have done little to dispel negative attitudes on either side.

Sponsoring organizations that have provided intergenerational programs have found that younger persons have reported the following:

- the ability to distinguish between the facts and the myths of aging
- a better understanding of the physical and social aspects of aging
- less negative attitude toward their own aging.

On the other hand, the elderly have acquired:

- a more trusting openness with younger persons and an ease in communication
- a better understanding of the problems and lifestyles of younger persons
- an opportunity to learn from persons other than their peer group.

Programming Principles

The intergenerational program is the end result when theory is combined with sound planning and organizational techniques. It involves determination of need, development and allocation of resources and problem management (where necessary), and evaluation.

Determination of Need

In considering needs as the basis of development, most programs have their origin in the following:

- individual needs being unmet and this need is either expressed or observed
- perception or knowledge of planning authority that needs are being unmet
- request from community whose needs are being unmet.

Individual needs, which are addressed by participation in recreation activities, range from the physiological to what Maslow has termed self-actualization. Self-actualization refers to the use of recreation activities for personal enhancement. For this reason programs must be challenging and provide stimulation rather than simply fill time.

Within the range of activities possible in the intergeneration program, it is not difficult to address any or all of these needs.

Development of Resources

The development and allocation of resources refers to the necessity of answering the following questions.

Where will the program take place?

Most intergenerational programs start with younger persons being invited to the location of the senior programs. Important here are issues of appropriate space and a location suitable to the type of program. For example, you should not attempt to plan an oral history taping in close proximity to the weekly practice of the senior choir.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow has provided a model for understanding and classifying human needs which can be used in intergenerational program development. These intergenerational program examples can be effective in meeting other needs. For instance, taking part in a junior/senior Olympics program may be an example of an activity meeting a physiological need, but it could very well satisfy love, esteem or self-actualization needs. The following chart is not all inclusive, but offers some examples of how intergenerational programs can be used to address a variety of older adult needs.

LEVEL OF NEED	EXAMPLE	INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAM EXAMPLES
Physiological needs	Physical Activity	Junior/senior Olympics, walking, hiking, swimming, golf, horseshoes, bowling, square-dancing, lawn bowling, shuffleboard, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, skating, cycling.
Love needs	Membership in and affiliation with group activities. Participation in meaningful relationships (one-to-one or group).	Foster grandparent program, highschool home visiting program, nursing home and home for the aged visiting program, day-care volunteer program.
Esteem need	A desire for recognition, attention, status and appreciation.	Junior/senior volunteer recognition program, centre-sponsored student arts and crafts exhibition, school-sponsored senior craft exhibit, shared program leadership roles.
Self-actualization needs	A need to use talents and abilities, a striving toward creativity and inventiveness.	Junior/senior cabaret night, intergenerational hobby exhibition, drama and music program, creative arts program.

If the activity involves moving the program outside the senior centre or club, then consideration must be given to accessibility (both to and into the facility) and the availability of necessary equipment.

Who is available to provide leadership?

The most successful of recreation programs are those that allow for individuals to present ideas, make suggestions, or to give advice. In order for intergenerational programs to be mutually beneficial, the planning process must allow for free exchange of information. A senior need not always take the main leadership role. In some cases it may be more appropriate for a younger person to assume leadership or for the task to be shared, depending on who has the appropriate skills.

How much will the program cost?

The cost of the program is not only measured by the actual dollar expenditure but also in terms of time and energy spent. Because of the innovative nature of intergenerational programs, the time and energy needed initially may seem to be demanding. However, in the long term, as leadership emerges from the group, administration time is diminished.

Financial resources for new programs are usually scarce. Therefore, if started on a small scale, there is the opportunity not only for an early sense of achievement but for evaluation and modification before substantial financial commitments are made.

Where will the program participants come from?

In every community there are agencies providing services from which to draw young participants. As well, many of these agencies and organizations are more than willing to share programs and ideas. Working in liason with these groups will also reduce the feeling that you are operating in a vacuum. Intergenerational groups can be initiated by contacting:

– local primary, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions

– organized youth groups such as Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, Girl Guides, Pathfinders, 4-H Clubs, Junior Achievement Clubs, Minor Sports Organizations, Big Sisters, Big Brothers, YMCAs, YWCAs

– church-related youth groups

– municipal recreation agencies, private and commercial recreation establishments

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Specialized Service Groups

– child and youth agencies such as Children's Aid, Juvenile Probation and Aftercare Services

– medical institutions, homes and schools for people who are physically and mentally handicapped; services for the visually and hearing-impaired

– specialized day-care facilities

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Problem Management

The concept of intergenerational programming as a basis for ongoing activities for older adults is relatively new. The senior program is based on the premise that there is an attempt to accommodate the need and desires of all participants. There are those who view the centre or club as their turf, and who favour age-segregation versus age-integration. For them, age-integration as a program for older adults is viewed with suspicion and dislike. It is important that these views are not overlooked or ignored.

Planners have long since agreed that the social requirements of the elderly are more easily met when there is a service designed especially for them. For this reason, many older people expect that they will find the centre or club a place to relate to peers only. For them there may be the fear of rejection and of negative reaction inherent in becoming involved with younger persons. Encouraging one-to-one exchange is one method of introducing the intergenerational component on a less-threatening basis. Small successes may lead to a greater acceptance and participation.

On a practical level, and from a financial standpoint, as resources become scarce for additional capital expenditures, it will become necessary to develop a shared-facility-use policy.

Evaluation

Often overlooked due to time constraints, proper evaluation remains the critical determinant of a program's need and its duration.

Evaluation techniques range in method from very sophisticated analytical written reviews to an informal discussion with a participant over a cup of coffee.

Whatever the method, objective assessment for any recreation program is necessary. But when a program is in the primary

stages of development, as is the intergenerational, then evaluation is of utmost importance. It is critical for your own use, but others need to make use of your results too, due to the lack of documented information in this area. Sharing both the positive and negative aspects of intergenerational programs can be a useful learning tool for everyone.

Intergenerational programs should provide challenges and new experiences while remaining within the capacities of the participants. As well, they should provide for increased levels of participation and learning. More importantly, they should respond to individual as well as group needs and provide for those values attributed to participation in leisure activities.

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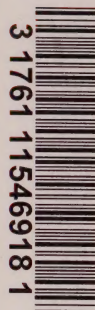
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